

America suffer more chronic and acute health conditions; they are likely to go without needed medical care; and they have shorter life expectancies. The reasons for the disparities are many, but they include access to affordable healthcare, inadequate research, and too few healthcare professionals of color.

Martin Luther King, Jr., called healthcare inequality the most shocking and inhumane form of injustice. Far too often, this inequality begins even before birth. It should shock the conscience of America—one of the wealthiest nations on Earth—that we have one of the poorest records on the globe for maternal health.

Think of this: The United States is 1 of only 13 nations in the world wherein the maternal mortality rate—the death of mothers—is worse now than it was 25 years ago. How is that possible? Every year in America, nearly 1,000 women die from pregnancy-related complications, and 70,000 others suffer near fatal complications as a result of pregnancy.

Now think of this: Women of color in the United States are two to three times more likely than White women to die as a result of pregnancy. In Illinois, sadly, that number is six times more likely. What makes these maternal deaths even more tragic is that an estimated 60 percent—more than half of them—are preventable.

I have given much thought to this and have spoken with real experts, which is why ROBIN KELLY—the Congresswoman from Illinois—and I joined with Senator DUCKWORTH and a number of other Democratic Senators in introducing legislation to decrease America's rates of maternal sickness and death, especially among new mothers of color. We call our measure the MOMMA Act.

One of the major provisions of this legislation is a requirement that Medicaid provide health coverage for new moms for a full year post-pregnancy instead of just 60 days, which it currently is. Congresswoman KELLY and I worked hard to get a modified version of this provision in the American Rescue Plan, President Biden's singular achievement in his first few weeks in office. Thanks to the law, States now have the option to expand their Medicaid programs for new mothers for the next 5 years.

Making sure that new moms have health coverage for a full year post-pregnancy will go a long way toward catching, preventing, and treating potentially life-threatening conditions and problems. This is critical because, in some States—even in my State of Illinois—nearly 60 percent of pregnancy-associated deaths occur between 43 and 364 days postpartum.

Well, there is good news to report today. While we are still working to pass the MOMMA Act, the State of Illinois pursued another avenue for expanding Medicaid coverage for new moms. For over a year, Illinois has been seeking a Medicaid section 1115

waiver to allow Medicaid-eligible women in our State to keep their health coverage for a year after their pregnancies.

Representatives KELLY, UNDERWOOD, Senator DUCKWORTH, and I have been leading letters and championing this effort from our State, and, this week, I am happy to announce that the Biden-Harris administration granted that waiver, making Illinois the very first State in the Nation to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for new moms. This will ensure access to vital health services, help to promote better birth outcomes, reduce the rate of maternal sickness and death in my home State, and, I hope, set the stage as a model for other States to follow.

I can think of no better way to honor this year's Black Maternal Health Week than to support State efforts to expand Medicaid healthcare to new moms. Another way would be to pass Senator BOOKER's 2021 Black Maternal Health Week resolution, which I am proud to cosponsor.

As poet Maya Angelou told us, we cannot change the past, but when we know better, we must do better. We now know that we can do better to protect the lives of pregnant women and newborn babies, and I am pleased that my State of Illinois will be part of leading that effort.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Madam President, today, in Chicago, at the Lurie Children's Hospital—one of our best—little 1-year-old Kayden Swann is in critical condition, clinging to life in the pediatric intensive care unit.

Last week, at 11 a.m., on a Tuesday morning on Lake Shore Drive—one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city—1-year-old Kayden was shot in the head while riding in the backseat of a car. He was an innocent victim hit in a road rage shooting.

As we pray for Kayden's recovery, as we express gratitude for the medical workers who are working around the clock to keep him alive, we have to ask ourselves a basic question: When it comes to this sickening gun violence that happens every day in our country, what are we going to do? Give up or stand up?

On March 23, I held a hearing on gun violence in our Judiciary Committee. There was a mass shooting spree that killed eight people in Atlanta, GA, on the day I announced the hearing. Then there was a mass shooting in Boulder, CO, that killed 10 people the night before the hearing. Others have followed.

Since that hearing on March 23, according to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been at least 38 mass shootings in less than a month in America, where a "mass shooting" is defined as an incident where at least four people were shot. This past weekend—and I am sorry to say this is not an exception—25 people were shot in the city of Chicago alone. Every day, we lose 109 American lives to gun violence. Hundreds more are shot and wounded, car-

rying physical and emotional scars for a lifetime. These victims are our neighbors, our friends, our families, and even a 1-year-old baby like Kayden Swann.

I am glad President Biden is stepping up to this issue and taking action. Last week, the President stood in the White House Rose Garden and called gun violence exactly what it is. It is a public health crisis. He is right. We need to take a public health approach to reduce the violence that is killing so many of our fellow Americans.

There is a playbook that works. We need to gather data and study the problem, identify causes and risk factors, and develop targeted prevention and intervention strategies that will help to bring the number of shootings down. We have stopped epidemics before—we are in the midst of one now—and we can do it again if we are willing to stand up and act. It works.

President Biden took action last week and announced a set of common-sense steps that are consistent with the Second Amendment and that actually will help reduce violence. He wants to reduce the proliferation of homemade "ghost guns," which are untraceable and often undetectable; regulate the use of stabilizing braces that can effectively convert pistols into short-barreled rifles, like the weapon that was used by the gunman in Boulder; put forth a model State extreme risk protection order law that would help States that want to use these interventions; restart an annual firearms trafficking report that tracks patterns of illicit gun trafficking; nominate a gun safety expert David Chipman to give the ATF its first confirmed leader since 2015. I am going to pay special attention to this nominee because it will come through the Senate Judiciary Committee.

How many times have you heard it said that we don't need new laws; we just need to enforce the laws that are on the books? One of the Agencies that enforces these laws is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, or ATF. What the gun lobby has done over the years is to make sure the ATF hasn't had the money or hasn't had any leaders. We haven't had anyone in the post for 6 years at the ATF with Senate confirmation. I want to change that if we can.

Last, but certainly not least, the President announced billions of dollars for evidence-based community violence intervention programs through the American Jobs Plan and other grant program efforts. These are smart, targeted, and important proposals that are well within the bounds of the Constitution and the President's authority. I commend him for that action.

Yet we shouldn't leave it to the President alone. We have a responsibility, too. We have to make sure we close the loopholes in the gun background check system that make it too easy for criminals and those with mental instability to get guns. We have known it for years, but we haven't

closed these gaps. The House has passed universal background check legislation. Now the ball is in the Senate's court. We need at least 10 Republicans if all Democrats will support it. I hope my Republican colleagues are willing to stand and vote to close these gaps.

There are other commonsense changes we can make that deal with gun violence and community prevention. At a hearing I held on March 23, Dr. Selwyn Rogers of University of Chicago Medicine pointed out that the NIH has nearly \$43 billion for medical research, yet only \$12.5 million dedicated to funding for research into reducing gun violence. We need to invest more into this research and into the CDC research, too. We also need to support evidence-based community programs that show they are effective in reducing violence.

Saving lives from the horrors of gun violence should not be a partisan issue. It is absolutely heartbreaking to think about little Kayden Swann's sitting in the backseat of a car on Lake Shore Drive—which I look out from my place in Chicago and see every day—and realize that he was shot in the head at the age of 1 and is now fighting to survive.

The question is, What are we going to do with this challenge of 40,000 gun violence deaths every year and more than 100 every day—give up or stand up?

I will tell you that I am not going to give up. I am going to do all I can to push commonsense, constitutional reforms to bring gun violence to an end in America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

HONORING OFFICER WILLIAM F. EVANS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, on Good Friday, another Capitol Police officer lost his life defending this building and all those in it.

Officer Billy Evans was killed when an individual rammed Officer Evans with his car at the barricade Officer Evans was manning. Another Capitol Police officer, Officer Ken Shaver, was injured in the attack.

We talk about how police officers leave their homes each day not knowing what they will face. Good Friday's attack was a reminder of how true that is.

We can only be thankful that despite the ever-present risk that they will not make it back to their homes, men and women like Officer Evans and Officer Shaver still choose to serve—to put themselves on the frontlines facing evil and danger so that the rest of us don't have to.

I know the officers of the Capitol Police have had an unthinkable difficult

few months. I hope they know how grateful we are for their service.

Today Officer Billy Evans lies in honor in the Rotunda, a fitting tribute to a man who lived and died to protect those who serve in this building.

My thoughts and prayers are with Officer Evans' two children, Logan and Abigail, with his mother Janice, and with all those who mourn this brave man. May his memory be eternal.

SUPREME COURT

Mr. President, on Friday, in what is fast becoming a theme of his Presidency, President Biden caved to the demands of the far left and officially established his Court-packing Commission.

Yes, Court packing, an idea that had been consigned to the ash heap of history almost a century ago, has been given new life by the far left who—wait for it—are upset that a duly elected Republican President was able to get his Justices confirmed to the Supreme Court.

That is right, Mr. President. The terrible crisis we are facing is that a Republican President was able to fill three vacancies on the Supreme Court.

I confess I had missed the part in the Constitution that said the Supreme Court is only legitimate if a majority of its members were nominated by a Democratic President or at least reliably delivers liberals' preferred outcomes.

But liberals didn't, and now they are eager to "restore balance" to the Supreme Court by expanding the number of Supreme Court Justices and ensuring that a Democratic President fills the new spots.

President Biden—the same man who once called President Roosevelt's failed Court-packing proposal a "bonehead idea" and a "terrible, terrible mistake to make"—is apparently falling in with the far left's demands.

His Commission, composed largely of left-leaning scholars, Democratic operatives, and a few conservatives as bipartisan window dressing, will consider Court packing and other structural "reforms" like term limits for Supreme Court Justices.

It is funny how Democrats weren't too concerned about term limits when revered liberal Justices were serving for decades. But faced with the terrible prospect that a Justice Barrett or a Justice Gorsuch might have a similarly long career, the left is suddenly eager to limit Supreme Court terms.

There are so many things wrong with the left's Court-packing proposals that it is difficult to know where to begin, but let's start with the ludicrous idea that packing the Court will somehow restore the Court's legitimacy in the eyes of the public—not that the Court's legitimacy has been lost in the eyes of anyone but far-left liberals.

In fact, the Supreme Court might be the Federal institution that garners the greatest degree of respect from the public. The Supreme Court's approval rating routinely exceeds that of Con-

gress and usually by a substantial margin.

But let's suppose for a second that liberals are correct and that the Supreme Court has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

If that is the case, there is nothing, nothing Democrats could do that would be more guaranteed to further undermine public trust in the Court than to pack the Court—nothing.

Do Democrats seriously think that they can enhance the credibility of the Supreme Court in the eyes of the American people by expanding it to add more Democratic Justices? Do they think the 74 million people who voted for Republicans in the last election are going to see this as adding necessary balance to the Court? If they do, they should think again.

As Justice Stephen Breyer noted just last week, "It is wrong to think of the court as another political institution. And it is doubly wrong to think of its members as junior-league politicians. Structural alteration motivated by the perception of political influence can only feed that perception, further eroding that trust."

That from Justice Stephen Breyer.

Republicans and, I venture to say, a lot of Independent and Democrat voters as well will see this for exactly what it is, and that is an attempt by Democrats to undermine an essential institution to ensure that Democrats get the Supreme Court rulings that they want.

Democrats can dress up their openness to Court-packing proposals in lofty language and faux expressions of concern for the institution, but no one—no one is fooled. This is about power, pure and simple. Democrats want power.

They want to be able to impose the policies they want when they want them, and they are afraid, if the Supreme Court isn't packed full of Democrat nominees, the Supreme Court might rule against them.

And so more and more Democrats are apparently perfectly willing to consider undermining, if not destroying, a fundamental part of our system of government to guarantee—to guarantee their political power.

Let's think about this in practical terms for a minute. Let's suppose that Democrats actually succeed in expanding the Supreme Court and adding more Democratic nominees. What do they think is going to happen next time there is a Republican President and a Republican Congress?

Well, I can tell you. Republicans would make their own move to "restore balance" and add some more Republican Supreme Court nominees. And then I imagine when Democrats retook power, they would do the same thing.

In a decade or so, the Supreme Court could be expanded to laughable proportions. Think about it. How many Justices are we going to have? Fifteen? Twenty? Thirty? There would be no end to this lunacy.